DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 212 980 CS 006 489

AUTHOR Smith, Nancy J.; Harris, Mary McDonnell
TITLE A Guide for Planning an Outreach Strategy.
PUB DATE Oct 81
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Plains Regional Conference of the International Reading Association (9th, Des Moines, IA, October 22-24, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Community Involvement; Elementary Secondary Education; *Family Involvement; *Outreach Programs; Program Administration; Program Content; *Program Development; Reading Instruction; *Reading Programs

ABSTRACT

Educators, recognizing the role of the home in preparing a child for reading and in fostering reading growth, have organized outreach programs to systematically utilize home influence. However, thoughtful planning is needed if these programs are to make the most of family involvement. Consideration of who, what, when, where, and how provides a structure to guide the information gathering process necessary for decision making in program planning. In thinking of who can be reached, it is helpful to consider who, other than the parent, has concern for the child. It is also wise to consider who, in addition to a school agency, can contact advocates, conduct meetings, distribute literature, and perform other tasks associated with a particular project. Another factor that is essential to the success of an outreach program is identifying its objectives. The following questions should be helpful in determining what the program should accomplish: (1) Is the goal to increase the child's interaction with a more mature speaker or reader? (2) Should the program provide skill instruction for adults? (3) Should the program teach advocates how to facilitate acquisition of reading skills by children? and (4) Should the program promote family support for education and facilitate information exchange? Once the goals of a program have been established, some of the specific means of accomplishing these goals can be addressed. Final consideration should be given to when and where the program will occur. (HOD)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED212980

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

# A Guide for Planning an Outreach Strategy

Nancy J. Smith
Mary McDonnell Harris
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Kansas State University 66506

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Nancy J. Smith

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS006489

"What can I do at home to help my child be a better reader?" This often posed parent question is being answered in some exciting ways through a variety of outreach programs throughout the country. Educators, recognizing the role of the home in preparing a child for reading and fostering growth, have organized programs to systematically utilize home influence. Enthusiastic commitment accompanied by careful planning, which has been based on local needs and resources, have yielded successful models and insights for others interested in designing an outreach strategy. Consideration of who, what, when, where, and how provides a structure to guide the information gathering process necessary for decision-making in program planning. Asking the right questions is as important in planning as knowing the answer!

Who can be reached?

Almost without exception the word parent consistently appears in the titles of outreach programs and reports about programs in educational literature. It might sound awkward initially, but there is at least one obvious reason for an alternative descriptor for who can be reached. In many instances it is not a parent who is responsible for a child. Additionally, if the appeal is made only to parents, other potential participants might not become aware of the role they could take. For example, substituting the term child-advocate for parent immediately lengthens the list of likely participants. In thinking of who can be reached, it is helpful to consider; who has concern for this child? The answers to the following questions may suggest some answers.

Can we reach parents?
Can we reach grandparents?
Can we reach older siblings?
Can we reach other relatives?

Can we reach guardians?
Can we reach pre-school parents?
Can we reach the learner?
Can we reach a concerned neighbor or friend?

The effect on reading ability of oral language development and backgound of experience during a child's pre-school years can not be overemphasized. It seems wise to direct special attention to reaching those child-advocates who can contribute to the pre-school learning environment at home or wherever a child receives care.

Who can reach out?

A school agency is a likely sponsor of an outreach program and school personnel have participated in a wide range of successful programs as materials designers, teachers, organizers, and publicity planners and spokespersons. However, educators from the sponsoring agency should not assume that as sponsors they must also be the only implementors. As with deciding who can be reached, it is wise to consider others who can contact advocates, conduct meetings, distribute literature, and perform other tasks associated with a particular project.

The impact of the initial contact with parents is of critical importance. If initial contact is made by letter or announcement, educational jargon must be avoided. Some programs place such high value on the initial contact that it is handled through personal visits from community workers (McWilliams and Cunningham, 1976).

It may be more effective in some instances if another advocate makes a home visit, accompanies an educator on a visit or assembles with other advocates. Enhanced credibility and diminished anxiety experienced by advocates may be the results. Parents must not be blamed for nor overly

alarmed about their children's educational progress. Neither may they be allowed to underestimate the potential influence of the family on educational achievement (Duncan and VonBehren, 1974). An outreach program can be a vehicle for personalizing the home/school relationship and creating a partnership in the best interest of the child.

It may be helpful to answer these questions to determine who can reach out in a community.

Can other parents reach out?
Can other volunteer adults reach out?
Can older students reach out?
Can teachers team with other community members (above) to reach out?
Can teachers reach out?
Can administrators lead, support, participate in reach out programs?

What do we want to accomplish?

A key to the success of an outreach program is identifying its mission. Determining a clear objective will facilitate the entire planning process and is an appropriate first step. If you do not know where you are going, can you know how to get there? Considering the following questions and comments may be helpful in determining what you want to accomplish.

1. Is the goal to increase the child's interaction with a more mature speaker or reader?

The benefits of a concrete strategy carried out on a daily basis may foster interaction resulting in increased oral language facility, an awareness by the child that reading is valued, modelling of reading behavior, or practice of reading skills. Increased advocate-child interaction has been the goal of a considerable number of programs.

A good example is provided by the Right to Read program sponsored by the state of Idaho in 1977-78. It capitalized on the formula, "Read to Your Children 15 Minutes a Day." This slogan was circulated by bookmarks,

bumper stickers, and radio and TV spots. Schools and libraries compiled listed of seasonal books for family reading aloud. Certificates were awarded to families who could present coupons showing that they read together 15 minutes a day, five days a week, for nine weeks (Truby. 1977).

A Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, program focused on participation in family communication rituals. Sharing and communicating feelings was a major purpose of this program, which provided parents with a ten-week course on family communication and a series of activity sheets on which to base daily family interaction rituals. A song title ritual, for example, engaged families in chanting and naming favorite songs, choosing song titles to describe the family, and writing a family song (Gollub, 1977).

Games provide the interaction focus on some programs. In Springfield, Illinois, parents made card games and board games to play with second graders each week. The games reinforced basic sight vocabulary. Family records of interactions were kept on special calendars (Duncan and VonBehren, 1974). As part of a game-centered program in Newark, Delaware, parents produced activities for survival reading skill development. By pretesting their children, parents were able to select survival reading skill activities appropriate for them (Cassidy and Vukelich, 1978).

Listening to children read aloud is the primary interaction activity in some programs. Listener instructions vary. Some advocate telling children unknown words (Freshour, 1972). Others guide parents in the use of picture, context, and phonic cues as they help children attack new words (Harrington, 1970). Parents are often taught a simple rule, such as "The Dirty Thumb Rule," for helping children determine whether a reading selection is too difficult. Assisted reading is recommended to parents by

Hoskisson (1974). In this process, the parent reads aloud to the child, and then the two read aloud together until the child is able to continue independently.

Children's literature, silent reading as a family, and realizing the reading potential of daily activities are featured in other programs. A Connecticut program interested families in reading aloud by exposing parents to children's literature (Baker and others, 1975). Parents who participated in an Ohio Teacher Corps program involved their families in SQUIRT (Sustained Quiet Reading Time) on a daily basis (McWilliams and Cunningham, 1976). A parent handbook published by the Colorado Council IRA fosters parent-child interaction by pointing out the reading potential of family activities such as eating at a restaurant or shopping at a supermarket (Kloefkorn and Fango).

Most strategies for family interaction are designed to supplement or support school instruction. The New Approach Method, piloted in the Trenton, New Jersey, schools, gives the parent the central instructional role. Daily reading instruction is offered children at school by their parents via the tape recorder (Teaching...1976).

2. Do we want to provide skill instruction for adults?

The rationale for sponsoring a program to achieve this goal is primarily that adults with skills can participate in home activities to help children as they acquire reading skills. They can serve as models to their children and perhaps become partners in the learning process.

3. Do we want to teach advocates how to facilitate acquisition of reading skills by children?

Consider these approaches. As mentioned above, the School District of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania sponsored a Parent Education Program in which

the homework consisted of specific activities to do at home with children (Gollub, 1977). In a program in Hamburg, New York, described by Harrington in How to Help Your Child with Reading at Home, adult education classes in reading provided recommendations for home activities to promote skill development. The Unified School District Adult Division of Los Angeles, California, sponsored lecture-discussion programs and television courses to teach parents how to help children with reading (De Franco, 1973).

4. Do we want to promote family support for education and facilitate information exchange?

Open communication among parents, educators, and children is vital to the support system provided by family involvement programs. Parents receive social and emotional support as they exchange information with professional educators and as they interact successfully with their children. These two communication channels must operate interactively.

Successful family interaction seems best guaranteed in programs that provide concrete, specific directions. The family is guided in the institution of one daily reading or communication ritual. Descriptions of the "ideal home" which suggest a complex restructuring of family life are not presented. By concentrating first on one family ritual, programs do not preclude helping families to explore other reading facilitating activities at a later time.

Information exchange balances the structure of the family interaction rituals by providing an open forum for discussion of pressing needs and promising alternatives. Only when information flows in both directions can parents become partners with teachers in the educational process. As parents grow in commitment to the partnership, they often find their own ways to support the educational program both at home and in the classroom.

Once parent commitment has begun, information exchange is relatively easy. A typical opening orients parents to the process of learning to read. McKee's Primer for Parents (1975) enables adults to relive some of the satisfactions and frustrations of acquiring meaning from print. Parents raise questions about reading and language instruction. They may wonder why there is so much emphasis on oral language in the prereading program. They may ask about the levels of the books used by children and the grouping practices of the school. Examining the materials of instruction used in children's classrooms and seeing live or videotaped reading instruction can go a long way in providing answers.

As teachers find themselves able to respond to parents, they need to raise questions, also. Parents can share insights on the typical reactions and current interests of their children. Some parents know a great deal about their children's reading and language abilities.

Parents share with parents, too. They report on ways to facilitate reading and language growth. They share problems encountered in trying to help their children. From sharing come the realizations that all children make mistakes, that there is no single "right" way to teach reading, and that parents can promote reading and language learnings at home.

How can we reach out?

Having determined the goal of a program, some of the specific means and feasibility of accomplishing the goal need to be analyzed. Careful assessment of resources is of primary importance. Having limited resources or more than anticipated necessitates re-examination of the goal. A reasonable match can be better achieved by answering such questions as the following:

How can we get advocates involved?
How much time can we commit?

How much money can we commit?
How can we provide a child care component?
How can we match our strategy with what we want advocates to do?

When and where can outreach occur?

Creative answers to this question may produce increased involvement by educators and advocates. Some can and will come to the school in the evening, but meeting times and locations must make parent participation as easy as possible. To accommodate a variety of family needs, agencies may select home or community meeting sites, holding small group gatherings at several times on a weekly or biweekly basis. Repeating sessions may allow two parents from the same family to participate at different times or enable parents to make up missed meetings. Letters, phone calls, packets, and home visits are provided by various agencies to parents who miss meetings. Some provide child care, including children, perhaps, in part of the session with adults. Some were able to attract parents only after convincing demonstrations that programs were planned in response to parent input (Harrington 1970, Breiling, 1976). Thoughtful consideration of these questions may yield interesting results.

Can we arrange flexible hours?
Can we reach into the homes?
Can we reach out by bringing advocates into the school?
Can we reach out by meeting advocates at other community gathering places?
Can we reach the concerned where they work?

## Conclusion

Continuing efforts to foster family involvement in the school development of reading and language are bound to occur. The wide variety of programs that has already evolved attests to the creative energy devoted to this concern. Few movements have the potential of family involvement for supporting the learning of children. Thoughtful planning can best insure that outreach programs will see this potential realized.

## References


Anselmo, Sandra. "Parent Involvement in the Schools." Clearinghouse, vol. 50 (March, 1977), 297-299.

Baker, Irving, Fran Durdeck, Elizabeth H. Rowell, and Mimi Schmitt. "Children's Literature at Home Base." Reading Teacher, vol. 28 (May, 1975), 770-772.

Breiling, Annette. "Using Parents as Teaching Partners." Reading Teacher, vol. 30 (November, 1976), 187-192.

Cassidy, Jack, and Carol Vukelich. "Survival Reading for Parents and Kids: A Parent Education Program." Reading Teacher, vol. 31 (March, 1978), 638-641.

De Franco, Ellen B. "Parent Education as an Aid to Improving Children's Reading." Adult Leadership, 21 (April 1973), 320-323.

Duncan, Linda J., and Barbara VonBehren. "PEPPER--A Spicy New Program." Reading Teacher, vol. 27 (November, 1974), 180-183.

Freshour, Frank W. "Beginning Reading: Parents Can Help." Reading Teacher, vol. 25 (March, 1972), 513-516.

Gollub, Wendy Leebov. "Family Communication Rituals to Aid Children's Learning." Language Arts, vol. 54 (September, 1977), 655-660.

Harrington, Alma. "Parents and the School." Reading Teacher, vol. 23 (May, 1970), 711-716, 726.

Harrington, Alma. "Teaching Parents to Help at Home," in Carl B. Smith, ed. Parents and Reading (Newark, Delaware: IRA, 1971).

Hoskisson, Kenneth. "Should Parents Teach Their Children to Read? Elementary English, vol. 51 (February, 1974), 295-299.

Jelinek, Janis. "The Role of the Parent in a Language Development Program." Journal of Research and Development in Education, vol. 8 (Winter, 1975), 14-23.

Kloefkorn, Merrillyn Brooks, and Mary E. Massa Fango. Parents, You Can Help! Colorado Council IRA, n.d.

Knox, Gerald M. "Your Child Can't Read: How Can You Help?" Better Homes and Gardens, vol. 50 (October, 1972), 4-8, 38, 39, 40.

McKee, Paul. Primer for Parents. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975).

McWilliams, David R., and Patricia M. Cunningham. "Project PEP." Reading Teacher, vol. 29 (April, 1976), 653-655.

Pikulski, John J. "Parents Can Aid Reading Growth," Elementary English, vol. 51 (September, 1974), 896-897.

Quisenberry, Nancy L., Candace Blakemore, and Claudia A. Warren. "Involving Parents in Reading: An Annotated Bibliography." Reading Teacher, vol. 31 (October, 1977), 34-39.